

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 222 894

CS 207 023

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TITLE Reporters and Legislators: An Interaction Theory Approach.
PUB DATE Jul 82
NOTE 47p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (65th, Athens, OH, July 25-28, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitudes; *Information Seeking; *Information Sources; *Interaction; *Interaction Process Analysis; *Legislators; Media Research; *News Media; Newspapers; News Reporting; Political Influences
IDENTIFIERS *News Reporters

ABSTRACT

A study tested five sets of hypotheses derived from an interaction model of the ways reporters and legislators exchange information. Three hypotheses attempted to distinguish among election-oriented, policy-oriented, and specialist legislators in the ways they seek information, and two hypotheses predicted the patterns of reporter-legislator interactions. A survey of Indiana state legislators and a content analysis of legislative reporting during one legislative session provided the data. Results indicated mixed support for the information-seeking hypotheses for legislators. In general, election-oriented legislators sought hometown media sources of information, while specialists sought capitol-based reporters. However, policy- and influence-oriented legislators seemed to use both capitol-based and hometown reporters. The expected avoidance of hometown media sources is also found for influence-oriented legislators. The usefulness ascribed to media sources followed the expected pattern, with election-oriented legislators ascribing usefulness to most media sources, followed by policy-oriented, specialist, and influence-oriented legislators. Story characteristics basically confirmed expectations that reporter interaction with sources was conditioned in part by editorial stress on copy production. (JL)

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REPORTERS AND LEGISLATORS

An Interaction Theory Approach

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A paper presented to the Theory and Methodology Division of the Association
for Education in Journalism, annual convention at Ohio University in Athens,
Ohio, July 1982.

ED222894

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REPORTERS AND LEGISLATORS

An interaction theory interpretation of state legislative news is explored in this paper. The approach assumes that legislators and reporters with complementary goals and needs "specialize" in one another. The implication is that different reporter-source relationships may have different news outputs.

What then are the major factors in the situations of reporters and legislators that shape their interactions? A survey of Indiana legislators and a content analysis of legislative reporting will be analyzed in a preliminary assessment of some concepts that help define the goals and needs of reporters and legislative sources, and thus the likely nature of their interaction.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

Numerous studies have generated interesting ideas about the relationships of governmental officials and the press.¹ Some have focused sharply on reporters, exploring their values, politics, role conceptions, and work routines.² Several master's theses and doctoral dissertations have attempted specifically to explore the influences on news reports in state legislative settings.³

This paper assesses how an interaction theory approach can extend these studies of reporters and elected officials. The interaction theory developed by sociologist George Homans is useful for this analysis of reporters and legislative sources because it focuses on factors influencing why relationships tend to persist or terminate over time.⁴ "Briefly, both behavioral psychology and elementary economics envisage human behavior as a function of its payoff: in amount and kind it depends on the amount and kind of reward and punishment it fetches," Homans asserts. This notion implies that reporters and legislators

who derive the most mutually rewarding reinforcement sustain their interaction, while unrewarding or punishing reporter-source relationships tend to end. The power to reward is the power to change behavior. This power depends on the goals of the actors, the resources they have for rewarding the needed activity of others, and the value of the rewards to others who are needed.

This interaction theory approach obviously emerges from an exchange rather than from an adversarial paradigm of routine reporter-source relationships. While adversary relations certainly occur, it is hard to imagine how most relationships could be adversarial most of the time and still persist. Of course, to the extent that the reporters and legislators are subject to expectations or injunctions governing interactions, the actors might experience higher costs or punishments than benefits. Adversarial relationships that persist might then be inevitable.

Consequently, the approach taken in this paper will adapt the interaction theory developed by Homans to take account of some important external influences on reporter-source relationships. Such external influences are stressed by European mass communication researchers Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in their call for a theory that transcends the exchange and adversary paradigms of the reporter-source relationship.⁵ As Homans himself emphasizes, pure social interaction requires that the actors themselves, and not some third party, reward or punish the exchanges. As Blumler and Gurevitch emphasize, both reporters and political sources must consider significant "others" who may reward or punish certain types of interactions. Reporters, for instance, must certainly satisfy the expectations of editors as well as take account of the claims of their sources. Similarly, legislators must worry about the opinions generated among voters, the power of leaders to promote or frustrate ambitions, and the response of interest groups to policy initiatives. Blumler and Gurevitch criticize the adversarial model for failing to provide any mechanism for

understanding the cooperation and collaboration between reporter and source in the communication process. But they also criticize the exchange model for overstressing this personal bargaining between reporter and source, neglecting how institutional settings define what is permissible or impermissible in the terms of the exchange.

It is clear from numerous studies that reporters and sources do have mutually beneficial exchanges with one another. It is less clear, however, that all reporters and all sources have the same uses for one another. We need some idea of the different types of exchanges that occur, and of the internal and external influences that produce the different types of exchanges.

Delmer Dunn in his study of Wisconsin statehouse reporters notes several reasons why state officials and lawmakers may seek collaboration with the press.⁶ Because the reporter has wide contacts, he can inform the legislator of the activities of other officials and opponents. The reporter's availability enables him to provide personal counsel on press relations and suggestions and reactions to ideas. Dunn too points out the differential value of publicity that the reporter can provide. Publicity can be mobilized for program support, personal image building, the launching of trial balloons, or simply for the neutral transmission of information to the public.

But if reporters can provide all these services, do all legislators want or need them all? Are there dimensions along which legislators may differ in what they seek from reporters? Two concepts useful for distinguishing lawmakers in their relations with reporters are subject specialization and political goal orientation.

Evaluating communication patterns within the U.S. House of Representatives, Robert Zwier found that members who held subcommittee chairmanships -- the subject specialists -- used staff and executive agency experts as major sources of information.⁷ Their non-specialist colleagues went to fellow members of the

House and to constituents for information. I suggest that Zwier's specialist differentiation might also govern the way information is obtained and exchanged among media and legislators.

Further, legislators may differ on information exchanges with media sources according to the influence, policy and reelection goal orientations observed by Richard Fenno in his study of the congressional committee structure.⁸ The influence oriented sought personal power and prestige through committee assignments that made them crucial to the operation of the House of Representatives. Other congressmen were interested primarily in constituent-serving committees that could help them secure reelection. Still others, described by Fenno as policy oriented, had special ideological concerns guiding their committee choices.

Specialization and political goal orientation may influence legislator interaction with reporters in a number of ways. Specialist sources may be more authoritative to the reporter who needs to be certain, but the non-specialist is more accessible to the reporter who needs to file copy quickly. The reelection oriented legislator has an obvious use for media access to voters. But the policy oriented legislator may want media coverage to build support for a particular bill. The influence oriented legislator may cultivate reporters to find out what is happening around government.

Certainly problems in "transplanting" these typologies to the state legislative level may occur. Fenno's goal orientation distinctions were observed during a study of Congress, where the stakes in power, policy and political ambition may stimulate goal orientations. As Alan Rosenthal suggests in a comprehensive summary of state legislative studies, the extent to which a legislator is an "amateur" or a "professional"--whose emotional and economic ties are to the legislature--may affect the intensity with which the goal orientations are acted out.⁹

Predictions also must be made cautiously about how specialization might

influence interaction with reporters and visibility of committee chairmen in the media. David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit found that the activity of individual U.S. Senators, rather than prestige committee position, produced the most coverage.¹⁰ They found that it is also necessary to be sensitive to the political party of the senator, and to particular issues that come before committees.

Of course, differences among reporters as well as among legislators affect interaction patterns. Dunn considers reporter role self-concept important for distinguishing reporters because such roles incorporate the kinds of personal goals and self-expectations reporters try to fulfill. His Wisconsin statehouse reporters exhibited four role types. The "neutral" tried merely to pass on information to the public, while the "translator" put that information into some sort of context. The "representative" was the frequently mentioned watchdog against wrongdoing, while "participant" roles ranged from the inadvertent precipitator of action to deliberate policy advocacy.

Hillard Torgerson in a study of Iowa legislative reporters considered "digging" behavior by reporters a dependent variable accounted for by a number of factors, including editor demand for certain kinds of stories.¹¹ He found that editor concern for exclusives positively correlated with digging for information sources as opposed to passive, "reaction reporting" of events. Editor concern for correct copy "mechanics" also correlated positively with digging, though a negative correlation was expected.

In a science convention setting, Sharon Dunwoody also found that editorial influences governed the number and type of sources used by reporters.¹² Not surprisingly, reporters with daily deadlines used fewer sources than reporters with less strict deadlines. But the less constrained reporters also tended to use sources

that made it possible for their reports to take a more independent perspective.

These studies suggest that an interaction theory approach must consider both important external influences and the personal goals of the actors involved. For legislators, specialization and political goal orientation seem important, with political party affiliation and legislative professionalism as important control variables. For reporters, the kind and level of newsroom emphasis on copy production and the type and intensity of reporter role self-concept seem most important.

Separate studies of the Indiana General Assembly conducted during the Spring 1981 "long session" provide a preliminary assessment of some of these concepts for distinguishing the interaction of reporters and legislators. A survey of members of the House of Representatives included measures of specialization and political goal orientation derived from the work of Zwier and Fenno. Several batteries of questions also probed the representatives' use of information sources, including television, newspapers, capitol-based reporters, hometown reporters, and hometown editors. The content analysis of legislative reporting examined differences in the source use of wire service reporters, newspaper statehouse bureau reporters, and locally based newspaper reporters. The sources measured included activities such as floor or committee action, interviews with types of legislators, use of printed documents such as bills, and background material such as media reports.

The wire reporters, the newspaper statehouse bureau reporters, and the locally-based newspaper reporters form a crude scale of "editor stress on copy production mechanics," a concept for distinguishing reporters very similar to those used by Torgerson and Dunwoody. On this scale, wire reporters with the most pressing deadlines are assumed to experience the most mechanics stress,

and newspaper statehouse bureau reporters the least. Local reporters have more distractions on their legislative attention than statehouse bureau reporters, but less pressing deadlines than wire service reporters.

HYPOTHESES

This study tests five sets of hypotheses derived from the notion that different types of reporters and legislators exchange information on the basis of personal goals and needs. One set tests whether specialization and political goal orientation affect how legislators use media sources for general information. Two sets of hypotheses test whether these characteristics affect how legislators assess and use media-supplied information about policy. Two other sets of hypotheses test how differences in editorial constraints affect the number and type of legislative sources reporters use. A final set of hypotheses tests whether differences in the characteristics of these actors is especially reflected among those reporters and legislators who have actually interacted in newsmaking activity.

Legislator Information Seeking Hypotheses

1. Election oriented legislators will use hometown reporters and editors for information more than capitol-based reporters.
2. Influence and policy oriented legislators will use capitol-based reporters for information more than hometown reporters and editors.
3. Specialists will use capitol-based reporters for information more than hometown reporters and editors.

The first hypothesis derives from the obvious need of the election oriented legislator for local political intelligence. For the influence and policy oriented legislators, however, governmental information is most important, and the capitol-based reporter can best supply it. The third hypothesis, informed by

Zwier's study, assumes that specialists are not likely to rely on any media source, but might go to the capitol-based reporter experienced in dealing with some legislative issue.

Media Usefulness Hypotheses

The interaction theory approach maintains that actors who exchange valued services will ascribe influence to one another. The legislative survey does not contain a measure for "influence," but does ask legislators to assess the "usefulness" of media-related information sources in finding out about "how a policy might actually work."

1. Election oriented legislators will ascribe the most usefulness to media sources generally, and especially to hometown reporters and editors.
2. Policy oriented legislators will ascribe the next most usefulness to media sources generally, and especially to capitol-based reporters.
3. Influence oriented legislators and specialists will ascribe the least usefulness to media sources generally, but will tend to ascribe some importance to capitol-based reporters.

The election oriented legislator may see himself more dependent on media sources generally for survival, with hometown media considered especially important because of their relevance to the local constituency. The policy oriented legislator is attentive to media, but his interest is in advancing some proposal or program. Statewide concerns, not local ones, may result in more importance being ascribed to reporters with statewide reach, such as the capitol-based reporters. But the influence oriented legislator and the specialist are more likely than the election or policy oriented legislator to see themselves as the most important sources of information on policy, and thus will tend to downplay the usefulness of media sources.

Story Characteristic Hypotheses

1. Newspaper statehouse bureau reporters will write stories with the most sources, followed by local reporters and wire reporters.

2. Newspaper statehouse bureau reporters should more frequently write stories using different types of sources, followed by local reporters and wire reporters.

The wire reporters facing the most deadline pressure must concentrate on a few, authoritative sources who are regularly accessible. The statehouse reporters are able to cultivate and search out sources appropriate to stories, rather than having to take sources who are merely available or most efficient to use. The local reporters should fall somewhere between the wire and statehouse reporters in number and types of sources used. They have more time than the wire reporters, and have easier access to local officials than the statehouse newspaper reporters. But they are not nearly as well situated as the statehouse reporters to develop legislative sources.

Reporter-Legislator Interaction Hypotheses

1. Patterns described in the Legislator Information Seeking Hypotheses will be even more pronounced when only those legislators who have actually interacted with reporters in interviews are considered.
2. Patterns described in the Story Characteristics Hypotheses will be even more pronounced when only interview stories--those embodying some interaction between reporters and legislators--are considered.

Interaction theory posits that actual interactions between reporters and legislative sources reflect exchanges serving the goals and needs of actors. These hypotheses assume that those interviewed legislators who turn up in the small story sample are likely to be especially involved in relationships with reporters and sensitive to differences in media sources of information. Certainly, then, we would expect that specialization and political goal orientation would differentiate those lawmakers who have actually been used by reporters as information sources in their own use of media information sources. Similarly, we would expect that interview story frequency would vary with level of editorial mechanics stress, and that interview stories as well would differ in source number and type according to that level of mechanics stress. These hypotheses thus test the

utility of this interaction theory approach for explaining how news gets made.

METHODOLOGY

This paper brings a multi-method approach to bear on the problem of analyzing the interaction of reporters and legislators. The analysis of interaction virtually requires the collection of data reflecting the perspectives and behaviors of both sets of actors. This study makes use of a survey of legislators and a content analysis of legislative reporting, both undertaken during the same legislative session. The survey of legislators provides self-reports on information-seeking from media sources, while the content analysis of legislative reporting traces how specific reporters use legislators as information sources. Considered jointly, these two sets of data can be used to isolate and examine some specific links between reporters and legislators, and thus focus more sharply on how characteristics of the reporters and legislators may have influenced interactions.

During the 1981 session of the Indiana General Assembly, a graduate political science seminar at Indiana University interviewed 57 of the 100 members of the House of Representatives.¹³ Six goal orientation questions probing the legislative priorities of respondents were grouped to form scales for the election, influence and policy orientation measures.¹⁴ Election questions probed the importance of election to the respondent, while influence questions tapped how important being influential was to the legislator. Policy questions measured the importance of getting specific legislation passed. Zero order correlations show that questions from the different scales cross-correlate, and the scales themselves are correlated significantly.¹⁵ Possibly the addition of behavioral measures to the scales might have differentiated legislators more dramatically on these orientations. However, Fenno's goal orientation typology also may not apply as well at the state legislative level. Consequently, this analysis will attempt to isolate statistically the effect of the measured goal orientation

tendencies on legislator information seeking. This analysis will also be conducted for separate subsamples of Republicans and Democrats, and for professionals --those legislators who have served three or more terms--and amateurs.¹⁶

Consistent with Zwier's study, the chairmen of committees were considered specialists. For minority Democrats, ranking minority members of committees also were considered specialists. The specialization measure correlated either slightly negatively or non-significantly with the orientation scales, indicating some degree of independence.¹⁷

The three orientation scales and the specialization measure were considered independent variables influencing legislator scores on 21 dependent variable information sources.¹⁸ These 21 information sources were arrayed in general use, policy usefulness, and policy use sets. The partial correlation of each independent and dependent variable in each of the three sets was computed controlling statistically for the effects of the other independent variables. The five media information sources--television, newspapers, statehouse reporters (including wire reporters), hometown reporters, and hometown editors--were the focus in this analysis. Each independent variable could have 15 partial correlations with media variables across the general use, usefulness, and policy use sets of media variables.¹⁹

While the survey of legislators was in progress, stories about the Indiana General Assembly from two constructed weeks of a random sample of 15 Indiana newspapers were collected by the Indiana University Bureau of Media Research. In addition, the same days were selected from the Associated Press and United Press International wire files used by the Indiana Daily Student, a campus publication. The sample produced 146 stories for the analysis, 72 from the wire services and 74 from nine of the 15 newspapers.

The major aim of the analysis of these content data is to explore how differences in the crude level of copy production stress are associated with use of sources to cover the legislature. The analysis focuses on differences between wire and newspaper coverage, and on differences between the legislative coverage of statehouse-based newspaper reporters and locally-based reporters. This latter comparison was performed using 26 stories produced by the two statehouse bureau reporters of a major newspaper, and 46 stories produced by locally-based reporters for eight other newspapers. The content analysis measured total number of sources used in each story, the activity, interview, print and background types of sources represented in the news reports, and the principal source or combination of sources relied on in particular stories.²⁰

LEGISLATOR INFORMATION SEEKING

Analysis of the overall sample indicates that political goal orientation does differentiate legislators on their assessment and use of media information sources. (See Tables 1, 2 and 3) In general, policy oriented legislators favorably assess and frequently use media information sources. Influence oriented legislators, on the other hand, downplay media usefulness and avoid media information sources. Election oriented legislators favorably assess and use media information sources, but for general rather than policy-related reasons.

The policy orientation scale produced seven positive and significant correlations with media sources across the three sets of variables. The influence orientation scale produced five negative correlations and one positive correlation. The election scale produced six positive correlations, all in the general use and usefulness sets.

These political goal orientation concepts also differentiated legislators

on use of other information sources as well, and reveal the importance of media sources to various types of legislators. Election oriented legislators had six of their nine significant correlations with media sources. Policy oriented legislators, however, use more sources generally, and media sources accounted for only seven of 17 significant correlations. The policy oriented legislators also use policy conferences (.36 correlation) and legislator associations (.39 correlation) as top general information sources. The influence oriented legislators mostly ignore or actively avoid media sources. The influence oriented tend to use information sources most relevant to state government, such as colleagues (.33 correlation), state agencies (.33 correlation), and legislative leaders (.33 correlation).

The overall sample analysis produced mixed results for the legislator information seeking hypothesis. Election oriented legislators do go to hometown editors for general information (.23), as expected. But contrary to expectations they also go to capitol-based reporters (.23) and show no tendency to go to hometown reporters. (See Table 1) Policy oriented legislators do go to capitol-based reporters for policy information (.36), but they also go to hometown reporters (.37), a finding contrary to expectations. (See Table 2) The influence oriented legislators were expected to seek out capitol-based reporters. Instead, the influence oriented legislators exhibited a slight tendency to go to hometown reporters for policy information (.21) and no significant tendency to either go to or avoid capitol-based reporters. (See Table 2)

The media usefulness hypotheses seem best confirmed by these data. (See Table 3) The election oriented legislators evaluate the usefulness of most media sources positively, followed by the policy and influence oriented. The election oriented ascribe the most usefulness to hometown editors (.38) and newspapers (.35), fol-

lowed by capitol-based and hometown reporters. Policy oriented legislators ascribe the most usefulness to capitol-based reporters (.39) and hometown reporters (.33), followed by television. The influence oriented legislators negatively or non-significantly evaluated the usefulness of all five information sources, with newspapers being the most disparaged (-.32).

While the political goal orientation measures produced a number of significant correlations with media variables, the specialization measure produced no significant correlations in the overall sample.

Political Party Specification

Separate analysis of Republicans and Democrats reveals how much more important political goal orientation is for Democrats--the "out" party--than for Republicans. This separate analysis also brings out how specialists of both parties, especially Republican specialists, use media information sources.

Democrats in the sample are overwhelmingly the more active media users and avoiders. (See Tables 4, 5 and 6) Across all independent and dependent variables in all three information source sets, Democrats produce 22 significant correlations, 13 positive and nine negative. Republicans produce only nine significant correlations, all of them positive. Within political party, however, the specialization measure produces seven significant and positive correlations, five of which are accounted for by Republicans.

The goal orientation patterns found in the overall sample continue to hold for Democrats, with Republicans producing too few significant correlations for any conclusive judgment. Policy oriented Democrats favorably assess and frequently use media sources, while influence oriented Democrats downgrade and avoid these sources. Again, election oriented Democrats favorably assess and use media sources but for general and not policy related purposes.

But if the Democratic "outs" dominate the orientation correlations, the Republican power holders dominate the specialization ones. Television and capitol-based reporters are considered the most important media sources (.45 and .43 correlations respectively), but the capitol-based reporters are the most frequently sought out for policy information (.36). Democratic specialists do not go to any media source for policy information, but do seek out hometown reporters for general information (.40).

Specific legislator information seeking and media usefulness hypotheses continue to get only mixed support when Republicans and Democrats are analyzed separately. Again, contrary to expectations, policy oriented legislators tend to use both capitol-based and hometown reporters, with policy oriented Republicans going only to hometown reporters for policy information (.39). Consistent with the hypotheses, election oriented Democrats favorably assess all information sources except TV, joined by election oriented Republicans on the favorable assessment of newspaper usefulness (.43 for Republicans, .41 for Democrats). (See Table 6) Finally, while influence oriented Democrats avoid or have no significant tendency to seek out media sources for policy information, influence oriented Republicans do seek out hometown reporters (.42) and hometown editors (.32), neither correlation in line with expectations. The specialization findings also produce mixed support for the hypotheses. Republican specialists, in line with expectations, do go to capitol-based reporters, but Democratic specialists go to hometown reporters, a finding contrary to expectations.

This analysis seems to indicate that the political goal orientation concepts are more useful for making distinctions among Democrats and Republicans. Possibly being out of power allows more Democrats to become "goal specialists," while governmental responsibilities tend to level goal orientations among Republicans. Certain media contacts with hometown reporters and editors seem

beneficial or necessary even for influence oriented Republicans. Policy oriented Republicans also cultivate hometown reporters, while policy oriented Democrats cultivate both capitol-based and hometown reporters.

Professionalism Specification

Some 30 legislators who have served three or more terms were considered professionals and 26 legislators who served two or fewer terms were considered amateurs. This analysis treats only the usefulness and policy use sets of variables since partial correlation coefficients could not be computed for amateurs in the general use set.

Analysis of these correlations indicates that professionals are more efficient than amateurs in their goal directed use of mass media sources of information. In line with hypotheses, election oriented professionals favorably assess the usefulness of newspapers (.54) and hometown reporters (.34), and actively avoid capitol-based reporters for policy information (-.43). (See Tables 7 and 8) Again in line with expectations, the policy and influence oriented professionals do cultivate capitol-based reporters for policy information (.33 and .35 correlations, respectively). Contrary to expectations, however, the influence oriented professionals also cultivate hometown reporters for policy information (.48), but avoid the newspapers reporters work for (-.37). This finding perhaps reflects some tendency for contacts with reporters to be both necessary and punishing for influence oriented legislators.

Interestingly, amateurs tend to favorably assess media usefulness, with seven of their eight correlations in that set being positive. (See Table 8)

But only policy oriented amateurs actually use media sources for policy information, specifically hometown reporters (.61) and hometown editors (.34). (See Table 7) Six of the 10 goal orientation correlations produced by the professional legislators are in the policy use set.

Separating the sample into professionals and amateurs also reveals that the specialist professionals cultivate both capitol-based and hometown reporters for policy information (.41 and .46 correlations respectively). A possible explanation for this finding is that specialist legislators seek out hometown reporters for information with district-specific application, while capitol-based reporters are used for more general policy information of statewide relevance.

Conclusions on Legislator Use of Media Information Sources

An examination of the effects of the political goal orientation and specialization measures indicates that television, newspapers, capitol-based reporters, hometown reporters and hometown editors are among the top sources of information legislators seek out or avoid. While few of the legislator information seeking hypotheses were unambiguously supported, it is possible to say that election oriented professionals seek out district-specific media sources such as newspapers, hometown reporters and hometown editors, and tend to avoid capitol-based reporters. Policy oriented professionals do seem to seek out capitol-based reporters more than any other media source. The influence oriented professionals, however, seek out both hometown and capitol-based reporters. Specialists also produce mixed support for the hypotheses, with Republican specialists behaving in line with expectations that they use capitol-based reporters, and Democratic specialists confounding expectations by their use of hometown reporters. Furthermore, professional specialists tend to use both types of reporters.

LEGISLATIVE REPORTING

The content analysis of legislative reporting focuses on the gross number of sources used by reporters, and the type of sources used. Four types of information sources were considered. These source types encompass the activities, interviews, print, and background materials reporters may use in stories.

This analysis reveals that 60 percent of the wire stories used only one source, and that 25 percent used only two sources. Only 32 percent of the newspaper stories used only one source, and 37 percent used two sources. Another 32 percent used three or more sources. Almost 50 percent of the statehouse newspaper stories used two sources, compared to 30 percent of the locally produced newspaper stories. About 17 percent of both statehouse and locally produced stories used three sources. However, the locally produced stories showed a greater tendency to use four or more sources than the statehouse bureau stories. Thus, the hypothesis that newspaper statehouse bureau reporters would use more sources in their stories than locally based reporters is confirmed for up to three sources. Source use by wire reporters was in line with expectations.

In general, activity sources were the major source type in 46 percent of the wire reports, compared to 22 percent of the newspaper stories. Newspaper reporters used interviews as the major source type in 47 percent of their stories, compared to 14 percent for the wire produced stories. Again, statehouse and local reporters differed in their use of interviews as the major source, with exclusive use of interviews accounting for 35 percent of the local stories and only 11 percent of the statehouse stories. The statehouse bureau reporters tended to use activities and interviews both, which accounted for 29 percent of their stories, or activity and print sources, which accounted for another

25 percent of their stories.

The statehouse bureau reporters are thus far more likely than wire or local reporters to use at least two different types of sources in their stories. Sixty percent of the statehouse bureau reports used combinations of activity, interview, print and background sources, compared to 40 percent of the locally produced stories and 30 percent of the wire reports. Thus, the hypothesis that the statehouse bureau reporters who are at least "mechanically" constrained would use different types of sources more often than local and wire reporters has been supported by these findings.

LEGISLATORS AND REPORTERS

Using both the survey and content analysis data sets, it is possible to get a more precise idea of how reporters and legislators relate to one another in concrete situations. Specific legislators who were interviewed for stories can be identified in the content analysis data set. Those legislators who were included in the legislative survey can then be examined to determine how political goal orientation might have conditioned their use of media sources of information. Specifically, do the overall sample patterns hold for those legislators who actually interact with reporters seeking stories? Moreover, by analyzing and comparing only stories in which legislators have been interviewed, it is possible to gain a more specific idea of how these person-to-person interactions influenced news reports. It is also possible to see how interview stories themselves--those directly resulting from interactions between reporters and legislative sources--differ in source use pattern according to the crude scale of editorial stress on copy production.

Legislators Interviewed by Reporters

Eleven members of the House of Representatives interviewed in stories in

the content analysis sample were also part of the survey of the legislature. Although a "sample" of 11 is certainly too small to be anything but tentative and suggestive, results of correlational analysis seem to throw into sharper relief patterns observed in the overall sample.

Consistent with the hypothesis, election oriented legislators who were actually interviewed for stories displayed a great tendency to use hometown reporters for general information ($r = .92$, $p = .005$) and avoid capitol-based reporters ($r = -.65$, $p = .08$). The interviewed election oriented legislators also went to hometown editors for policy information ($r = .79$, $p = .03$). These are findings we would expect on the basis of the interaction theory premise that the hometown media sources could supply valued information relevant to electoral success.

Also now in line with hypotheses, the policy oriented legislators actually interviewed for stories showed a great tendency to seek out capitol-based reporters for policy information ($r = .66$, $p = .08$) and avoid hometown reporters ($r = -.73$, $p = .05$). Again, this finding is consistent with an interaction theory perspective. The policy oriented legislators experienced in dealing with reporters may cultivate the capitol-based reporters because they can supply valued information about relevant policies and programs better than their newsroom-based colleagues.

The interviewed influence oriented legislators continue to show negative or non-significant correlations with media information sources, with the exception of general use of television ($r = .70$, $p = .06$). As originally expected, the interviewed influence oriented legislators actively avoid hometown reporters and hometown editors for general information (for reporters, $r = -.98$, $p = .001$; for editors, $r = -.83$, $p = .02$). Possibly seeking out TV sources of

information is less threatening to influence oriented legislators than interaction with reporters.

Interview Stories

Interaction with sources as opposed to the observing of legislative events makes a big **difference in stories**. Interview stories tend to be multi-source stories regardless of whether they are produced by hard-pressed wire reporters, deskbound newspaper reporters, or statehouse beat regulars. However, the **level of mechanics** constraint does seem to determine how often interview stories will be written, and the number and different types of sources those interview stories contain.

Of the 27 wire stories written by four identifiable AP and UPI reporters, 11 used interview sources, several of whom appeared in a number of stories. Two **interview sources used a number** of times by both AP and UPI reporters are the House Speaker and the Republican Party leader. UPI reporters also talked to the chairman of the House Ways and Means committee and to the chairman of the House Elections committee. Both committees were important because of budget cuts and redistricting. AP reporters also talked to the sponsor of a lobby reform bill, a controversial issue in a legislature that recently saw one of its members jailed for influence-peddling. Interview stories for AP averaged just **over 2 sources per story**, compared to a 1.6 overall average. Interview stories for UPI averaged 4 sources per story, compared to an overall average of 2.3 .

Two reporters working for the statehouse bureau of a large metropolitan newspaper **produced** seven interviews out of 25 bylined stories. Those interviewed were a mixture of legislative leaders, authors of controversial bills, and home district representatives. The House Speaker and minority leader were interviewed, along with the House Rules committee chairman who was also the sponsor

of a bill **applying specifically** to the newspaper's community. One home district legislator was interviewed about a local redistricting fight, another on a controversial smoking bill, and a third--a minority group member--was asked for comment on a resolution concerning Martin Luther King. Again, interview stories tended to be multi-source stories involving print or activity sources as well. The average number of sources used in statehouse bureau interview stories was 4, compared to the overall statehouse bureau average of 2.3.

A local reporter for a major **metropolitan** newspaper who frequently went to the state capitol produced nine stories about the legislature, five of which were based on interviews. All interviews were conducted with four area representatives, each commenting on one or more topics of special concern to the local community, especially school board and reapportionment issues. Consistent with general findings on local stories, the pattern here was for interviews to be the single source type used. In only one of the five interview stories was the interview supplemented with an **activity** or print source. Nonetheless, interview stories for this reporter averaged 4.4 sources, compared to a 3.4 average overall.

The stories from reporters in two smaller communities were also analyzed. Again, home district interviews were the major source used, with one newspaper concentrating all its legislative coverage on a single issue of intense community concern, and the other newspaper using its representatives (a Republican and a Democrat) as general informers and commentators on several issues. Interestingly, the newspaper concentrating on the single issue supplemented interviews with media reports and other print sources. The newspaper that covered a number of issues was close enough to the state capital to occasionally get a reporter there to cover a committee or floor action as well.

These findings indicate that the kind and number of sources used by reporters are associated with different levels of mechanical constraints. The wire reporters

mostly cover activities, but when they do get interview sources, those sources are likely to be legislative and political leaders. The reporters from home districts, not surprisingly, use local representatives who are easily accessible. Only rarely, however, can these interviews be supplemented with other information sources. The statehouse bureau reporters seem to have the most freedom to interact with sources. They use legislative leaders, rank and file legislators, home district representatives, and other types of sources that promote an independent perspective on events.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of Findings

This study found mixed support for the information seeking hypotheses for legislators. In general, election oriented legislators do seek out hometown media sources of information, while specialists seek out capitol-based reporters. However, policy oriented legislators and influence oriented legislators seem to use both capitol-based and hometown reporters. But when just legislators who have been interviewed for stories are considered, the hypothesized differences in using home district and capitol-based reporters are found for election and policy oriented legislators. The expected avoidance of hometown media sources is also found for influence oriented legislators.

The usefulness ascribed to media sources follows the expected pattern, with election oriented legislators ascribing usefulness to the most media sources, followed by the policy oriented, the specialists, and the influence oriented.

Finally, story characteristics basically confirm expectations that reporter interaction with sources is conditioned in part by editorial stress on copy production. Newspaper statehouse bureau reporters generally use the most sources and different types of sources, followed by local reporters and wire reporters.

Implications for Research

The assessment of an interaction theory approach to reporter-legislator relationships indicates that a multi-method focus on the actors can be used to bring their exchanges into sharper relief. Further research must concentrate on discerning finer distinctions among reporters that may condition interaction with sources. Reporter role self-concept must be brought into the analysis, as well as other forms of editorial injunctions to produce certain copy qualities. It is also necessary to refine and test the specialization and political goal orientation distinctions among legislators. In particular, it is necessary to probe the conditions that may lead to the dominance or suppression of one orientation or another during a legislator's career, or at particular moments in that career.

The results of the tests of hypotheses also suggest that it is necessary to probe the motivations of both reporters and sources to get at the reasons they perceive for turning to one another. If the exchange of benefits, as posited by interaction theory, is at the core of continuing relationships, it is necessary to probe how the actors themselves perceive and interpret this process.

Implications for Theory

European mass communication researchers Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch have called for a theory of reporter-source relationships that transcends the exchange and adversary models. An interaction theory approach can help build that new theory by focusing on both sets of newsmaking actors, and by taking into account both personal goals and external influences on reporter-source relationships.

This perspective in part replicates and in part extends the existing tradition of mass communication studies of legislators and reporters. The aim is to widen

the scope of the existing perspective to incorporate the lawmakers more fully as newsmaking partners, while focusing on distinct types of relationships and their consequences for news.

This approach certainly has implications beyond the legislative setting, and the scope and utility of the theory should be tested on other beats, and with other media, as well. Are crucial variables in reporter-source relationships the same in city hall as in the state legislature? Are they the same on Capitol Hill? Under what organizational **and professional conditions do broadcast and print** reporters have the same types of interactions with sources?

An interaction theory approach to reporter-source relationships is bound to raise a number of questions. In that alone, it should make a worthwhile contribution to the exploration of this area of mass communication research.

Table 1: Partial Correlation Coefficients Between Frequency of Using Media Sources for General Information and Political Goal Orientation*

		Media Information Sources				
		Television Use	Newspaper Use	Capitol-Based Reporter Use	Hometown Reporter Use	Hometown Editor Use
Legislator Political Goal Orientation Measures	Election Orientation	NS	NS	.23	NS	.23
	Influence Orientation	NS	-.24	NS	NS	NS
	Policy Orientation	.22	NS	NS	.26	NS

*NS= Not Significant at .10 Level

Table 2: Partial Correlation Coefficients Between Frequency of Using Media Sources for Information about How Policies Work and Political Goal Orientation

		Media Information Sources				
		Television Use	Newspaper Use	Capitol-Based Reporter Use	Hometown Reporter Use	Hometown Editor Use
Legislator Political Goal Orientation Measures	Election Orientation	NS	NS	NS	NS	NS
	Influence Orientation	-.21	NS	NS	.21	NS
	Policy Orientation	NS	NS	.36	.37	NS

Table 3: Partial Correlation Coefficients Between Perceived Usefulness of Media Sources of Information about How Policies Work and the Political Goal Orientation

		Media Information Sources				
		Television Importance	Newspaper Importance	Capitol-Based Reporter Importance	Hometown Reporter Importance	Hometown Editor Importance
Legislator Political Goal Orientation Measures	Election Orientation	NS	.35	.31	.27	.38
	Influence Orientation	-.26	-.32	NS	NS	-.21
	Policy Orientation	.24	NS	.39	.33	NS

Table 4: Partial Correlation Coefficients for Republicans and Democrats Between Frequency of Using Media Sources for General Information and Political Goal Orientation

		Republicans/Democrats				
		Media Information Sources				
Legislator Political Goal Orientation Measures		Television Use	Newspaper Use	Capitol-Based Reporter Use	Hometown Reporter Use	Hometown Editor Use
	Election Orientation	NS/-.37	NS/NS	NS/NS	NS/NS	NS/NS
	Influence Orientation	NS/NS	NS/-.44	NS/NS	NS/NS	NS/-.45
	Policy Orientation	NS/.49	NS/NS	NS/NS	NS/.72	NS/NS

Table 5: Partial Correlation Coefficients for Republicans and Democrats Between Frequency of Using Media Sources for Information about How Policies Work and Political Goal Orientation

		Republicans/Democrats				
		Media Information Sources				
Legislator Political Goal Orientation Measures		Television Use	Newspaper Use	Capitol-Based Reporter Use	Hometown Reporter Use	Hometown Reporter Use
	Election Orientation	NS/NS	NS/NS	NS/NS	NS/NS	NS/NS
	Influence Orientation	NS/NS	NS/NS	NS/NS	.42/NS	.32/- .36
	Policy Orientation	NS/NS	NS/NS	NS/.44	.39/.38	NS/NS

Table 6: Partial Correlation Coefficients for Republicans and Democrats Between Perceived Usefulness of Media Sources of Information about How a Policy Works and Political Goal Orientation

		Republicans/Democrats				
		Media Information Sources				
Legislator Political Goal Orientation Measures		Television Importance	Newspaper Importance	Capitol-Based Reporter Importance	Hometown Reporter Importance	Hometown Editor Importance
	Election Orientation	NS/NS	.43/.41	NS/.43	NS/.54	NS/.62
	Influence Orientation	NS/-.62	NS/-.75	NS/-.44	NS/-.49	NS/-.37
	Policy Orientation	NS/.57	NS/NS	NS/.64	NS/.60	NS/NS

Table 7: Partial Correlation Coefficients for Professional and Amateur Legislators Between Frequency of Using Media Sources of Information about How Policies Work and Political Goal Orientation

		Professionals/Amateurs				
		Media Information Sources				
Legislator Political Goal Orientation Measures		Television Use	Newspaper Use	Capitol-Based Reporter Use	Hometown Reporter Use	Hometown Editor Use
	Election Orientation	NS/NS	.49/NS	-.43/NS	NS/NS	NS/NS
	Influence Orientation	NS/NS	-.37/NS	.35/NS	.48/NS	NS/NS
	Policy Orientation	NS/NS	NS/NS	.33/NS	NS/.61	NS/.34

Table 8: Partial Correlation Coefficients for Professional and Amateur Legislators Between Perceived Usefulness of Media Sources of Information about How Policies Work and Political Goal Orientation

		Professionals/Amateurs				
		Media Information Sources				
		Television Importance	Newspaper Importance	Capitol-Based Reporter Importance	Hometown Reporter Importance	Hometown Editor Importance
Legislator Political Goal Orientation Measures	Election Orientation	NS/NS	.54/NS	NS/.51	.34/NS	NS/.42
	Influence Orientation	NS/-.47	-.37/NS	NS/NS	NS/NS	NS/NS
	Policy Orientation	NS/.51	-.34/.53	NS/.51	NS/.57	NS/.37

1. Among a number of interesting studies of reporters and officials are: Douglas Cater, The Fourth Branch of Government (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1959); Walter Gieber and Walter Johnson, "The City Hall 'Beat'," Journalism Quarterly, Vol. 38, No. 3, Summer 1961, pp. 289-297; Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963); Leon V. Sigal, Reporters and Officials (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath & Co., 1973); Donald R. Matthews, U.S. Senators and Their World (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Herbert J. Gans, Deciding What's News (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979).
2. Among interesting studies exploring reporter values and perceptions are: Leo C. Rosten, The Washington Correspondents (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937); William O. Chittick, State Department, Press and Pressure Groups (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1970); John W. Johnstone, et. al., The News People: a sociological portrait of American Journalists and their Work (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976); Gaye Tuchman, Making News: a study in the construction of reality (New York: Free Press, 1978).
3. Two of these will be discussed below. Other legislative studies examined include: Carol Hilton and Peter Clarke, "Reporting the Legislature: A Study of Newsmen and Their Sources" (Unpublished paper, University of Washington, 1966. This paper is based on Hilton's master's thesis completed at the University of Washington in 1966); Carolyn Stewart Dyer and Oguz B. Nayman, "Under the Capitol Dome: A Survey of Relationships Between Legislative Reporters and State Legislators" (Paper presented to the Mass Communications and Society Division, Association for Education in Journalism, Wisconsin, Aug. 23, 1977); Richard A. Hatch, "Reporters and Legislators in Illinois: Their Roles and How They Interact" (Ph.D. Dissertation in Communications, University of Illinois, 1969); Charles W. Wiggins and J. Paul Yarbrough, "Reporters and the Legislative System: A Study of Perceptions and Performance" (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, May 3 to 5, 1973, Chicago, Illinois); Dennis E. Wilden, "Antecedents of Reporting Behavior: A Comparative Analysis of Legislative Reporters in Three States" (Unpublished MS. thesis, Iowa State University, 1978).
4. George C. Homans, Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961).
5. Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, "Role Relationships in Political Communication" (Paper prepared for: D. Nimmo and Kay Sanders (eds.) Handbook of Political Communication, March 1981).
6. Delmer Dunn, Public Officials and the Press (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969).
7. Robert Zuder, "The Search for Information: Specialists and Non-Specialists in the U.S. House of Representatives," Legislative Studies Quarterly (1979) pp. 31-42.
8. Richard Fenno, Jr., Congressmen in Committees (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1973).
9. Alan Rosenthal, Legislative Life (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).
10. David H. Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, "News Media Coverage of U.S. Senators in Four Congresses, 1953-1974," Journalism Monographs No. 67, April 1980.

11. Hillard Torgerson, "The Correlates of Reporter Performance and Influences: A Study of 1971 Iowa Legislative Reporters" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Iowa State University, 1974)

12. Sharon Dumwoody, "Science Journalists: A Study of Factors Affecting the Selection of News at a Scientific Meeting" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1978)

13. Some 35 of those interviewed were Republicans and 22 were Democrats. This reflects almost exactly the party proportions in the House.

14. The questions were grouped on the basis of face validity. The Introduction was worded: "Serving in the Indiana General Assembly can help a person to accomplish several things. I'd like you to tell me whether the following purposes are very important, quite important, somewhat important, of little importance, or not important to you."

Responses used for the election scale are:

- a. "Opportunity to be reelected to the Assembly so that I can work towards other goals that are important to me."
- b. "Chance to be reelected so that I can continue to help constituents."

Responses used for the influence scale are:

- a. "Opportunity to get to know more influential people in the Assembly who may help me while I am a member of the Assembly."
- b. "Opportunity to learn how to get things done in the Assembly, for example, how to push a bill through."

Responses used for the policy scale are:

- a. "Opportunity to have an impact on one or two issues of special importance to me."
- b. "Chance to have a part in encouraging or creating better public policy in one or two specific areas of special interest to me."

Scores on these scales could range from 2 to 10. The election scale mean was 7.6, with a standard deviation of 2.1. The influence scale mean was 7.2, with a standard deviation of 2.5. The policy scale mean was 7.3, with a standard deviation of 2.3.

Republicans and Democrats had similar mean scores on the election and influence scales. However, Republicans had a mean of 7.1 on the policy scale, compared to 7.6 for the Democrats.

Professionals and amateurs had similar mean scores on the election and policy scales. However, professionals had a mean score of 7.0 on the influence scale, while the amateur mean was 7.7.

15. The correlation of the election and influence scales was .63. The correlation of the election and policy scale was .48. The correlation of the influence and policy scale was .41. These correlations were significant beyond the .05 level. Interscale correlations were higher for Republicans and Professionals.

The election-influence correlation for Republicans was .70, compared to .44 for Democrats. The election-policy correlation for Republicans was .56, compared to .42 for Democrats. The influence-policy correlation for Republicans was .56, compared to .25 for Democrats.

The election-influence correlation for Professionals was .79, compared to .38 for Amateurs. The election-policy correlation for Professionals was .64, compared to .35 for Amateurs. The influence-policy correlation for Professionals was .57, compared to .23 for Amateurs.

16. Crosstabulation of the political party and professionalism dichotomies reveals that Republicans have a slightly greater but non-significant tendency than Democrats to be professionals.

17. Specialization correlated $-.29$ with the election scale, $-.24$ with the influence scale, and $-.14$ with the policy scale.

18. The information sources measured were: legislative colleagues; legislative leadership; committee staffs; caucus staffs; committee reports; Legislative Services Agency; interim study committees; State Library Reference Service; governor; state agencies; interest groups; constituents; federal agencies; television; newspapers; capitol reporters; hometown reporters; hometown editors; university and professional research; legislator associations; policy conferences.

These sources were arrayed in three sets:

- a. General Use Set: "Legislators ordinarily obtain information from a variety of sources. About how frequently do you go to these sources for the information you want?"
- b. Usefulness for Policy Set: "With special reference to policy information, how useful, on a scale of 1 to 5, do you expect the following sources to be in providing information about how a policy might actually work?"
- c. Policy Use Set: "About how frequently during the session do you expect to go to these sources for information about how a policy might actually work?"

19. Missing data generally reduced the effective sample size for this analysis to below 45. Since it is more difficult to reach statistical significance with a small sample, it was decided to accept a significance level of .10 in this exploratory study to reduce the possibility of a Type II error.

20. The following types of sources were counted for the content analysis: floor activity; committee activity; press conferences; leader interviews; specialist interviews; rank and file member interviews; home district legislator interviews; non-legislative source interviews; printed bills; reports; other documents; news releases; media sources; books.

- a. Total Sources Used: This was considered to be a simple total of all sources listed above. Thus, a reporter who covered two committees for a story would be considered to have used two sources, regardless of how many lawmakers he might have quoted as speaking at the meeting.
- b. Principal Source Type: The sources listed above were grouped into four major types. Activity sources were considered to be floor, committee, and press conference action. Interview sources were considered to be leader, specialist, rank and file, home district, and non-legislative source interviews. Print sources were considered to be printed bills, reports, other documents and news releases. Background sources were considered to be media and books or other scholarly sources. Thus, the reporter who covered two committees for a story would be counted as using two activity sources.